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## EVANGELISM CONFERENCE

### ATTRACTS 1,200

by Nell McDonald

Interim (Diocese of Missouri)

ST. LOUIS -- "God is mightily renewing his Church in our day, thanks be to God!" declared the Rt. Rev. Michael Marshall, Bishop of Woolwich, England, to the 1,200 people attending the Episcopal Conference on Evangelism and Shared Ministry held here, Sept. 18-21.


Participants from all sectors of the U.S. and all segments of the church were urged to "uncover the features of the Body of Jesus Christ beginning with a renewal of ministries; a laity stripped of churchiness to become a new apostolate; a clergy stripped of clericalism and bishops becoming a true episcopate....There will be no passengers on board, but crew only. . . a priesthood of all believers," he said.

He also called for a renewal in service, for "we may have a case of koinonia-itis," in the church right now. "After worship ends, the service begins," Bishop Marshall added.

Planning for this conference sponsored by PEWSACTION and the Office of Evangelism and Renewal at the Episcopal Church Center in New York began almost immediately after its predecessor, the Pittsburgh conference in 1978. The Rev. Hewitt Johnston, rector of St. George's Church, Belleville, Ill., and his wife Cynthia, were conference coordinators, aided by a multitude of volunteers from their parish who stamped, folded and sorted mailings over many months and helped the conference run smoothly.

Moderator of the conference was Harry C. Griffith, executive director of the Anglican Fellowship of Prayer, one of the several organizations dedicated to continuing spiritual renewal and growth and increasing concern for sharing the Good News which are associated to form PEWSACTION.

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The conference was designed to equip clergy-laity teams for evangelism and ministry in their own congregations. Participants arrived in St. Louis having answered for themselves a searching questionnaire to focus on their 'at-home' situation. Team goal setting and defining steps to take immediately on returning to the parish setting concluded the conference.

Presiding Bishop John M. Allin began the first full day of the conference with a quiet talk-through of Morning Prayer, stressing that though we can't quiet the world, we can be still in it, and reflecting how the familiarity of the words sustains him in his busy schedule.

The Rev. Franklin Turner, Staff Officer for Black Ministries at the Episcopal Church Center, acknowledged as he launched the first morning of talks, that coming from an urban ministry, he had watched with some apprehension as "evangelism and church growth" came to be stressed by the church. He had feared an end of concern with social action issues and "a return to more traditional form, quietude and pietism." However, he found that Christian social action was weak if not informed by the Word. "We must be involved with social action, spiritual issues AND evangelism," he said.

At the workshops designed to amplify each major speaker's theme, Evangelism and Renewal Officer, the Rev. A. Wayne Schwab, urged participants to focus on and talk about their own conversion experiences as an important aspect of evangelism. For starters, he urged that Christians witness to their sons and daughters within the Body.

A second workshop leader, filling in for the Rev. Robert Hall who is recuperating from heart surgery, the Rev. Mark Dyer, rector of Christ Church, Hamilton/Wenham, Mass., challenged his listeners with the question, "When was the last time you spoke of your God? . . . .because other people speak about their gods." He cautioned conference participants that "We can't idolize any of the programs we're discussing here these few days. . . .Groups in the church should not be ends in themselves. Even Jesus Christ is not an end in Himself, but a way to the Father."

The third morning workshop speaker, the Hon. James K. Allen, St. Michael's and All Angels Church, Dallas, stressed ministering wherever people are, in accordance with the talents He's given. "Ministry is the response to our conversion experience," he said.





Addressing the second theme of the conference, Shared Ministry, the Very Rev. James Fenhagen, Dean of General Theological Seminary, New York, and author of Mutual Ministry: New Vitality for the Local Church, said he agrees that the Holy Spirit is sweeping through the church with intensity. He called for a community of many ministers gathered around the Lord, rather than the more traditional configuration of a community gathered around a minister. This will call for an understanding of 'giftedness' and spiritual discipline "to make the witness the world needs desperately to hear."

Leading workshops around the theme of Shared Ministry were Diocese of Pittsburgh Lay Evangelist Donald R. Wilson, Lewis "Scoop" Beardsley, Diocese of San Joaquin, California, and Christine Washington, founder of Advocate Community Development Corporation, Philadelphia.

Washington described her ministry of working to provide housing and training for minorities with funds from the Diocese of Pennsylvania and the government. Beardsley called apathy the greatest disease in the Episcopal Church. Wilson, while advocating preparation with prayer and commitment, said the only way actually to evangelize is to go out and do it.

Setting the stage for the next three workshops, Father Jack Wyatt, founder of Mission for Outreach, Renewal and Evangelism in Eureka Springs, Ark., spoke of teaching the apostolic faith by knowing God through Holy Scripture, the Sacraments and experientially. The Rev. David Perry, coordinator of the Church's Office of Christian Education, spoke on the educational aspect of preparing disciples; Fred Gore of Faith Alive spoke of how to form, encourage and enliven small groups within the parishes; and Barbara Merrick's workshop, Branches of the Vine, dealt with personal devotion and spiritual growth for the disciple.

The concluding speaker, David Burkett, consultant in lay ministry and parish development, Diocese of Bethlehem, Penn., pointed out that to show forth the Good News of Jesus Christ, 'relevancy' is less necessary than being consistent, holy and loving. People are called to do ministry by "each person taking responsibility for what they've already been called to do," he said. "The Lord is restoring His church to be that vital, life-changing, empowered community of love, as it was in the first centuries. Signs of a new beginning are all about us!"





In the subsequent workshops, University of the South President Robert M. Ayres, Jr., gave participants practical ways of building spiritual support systems; churchwoman from Kansas Betty Thomas Baker shared ministries in the market place -- the situations one finds oneself in out in the world; and Bishop Bob Gordon Jones of the Diocese of Wyoming talked of his renewal experiences in diverse places.

Built into the conference schedule were several opportunities to question or discuss with the principal speakers and workshop leaders. Also, a series of 'mini-versities' provided short courses in practical ways to implement evangelism and shared ministry. An integral part of the conference was the music of The Fisherfolk and the Rev. Pat Hutton's folk group from Dallas.

In a moving service of the Eucharist which closed the conference, Bishop Marshall reminded participants that they can't build the church on memories or nostalgia, but only when men and women experience the power of the risen Lord in their lives. "This conference has touched us all in unexpected ways with love, power and peace," he said. "Like the wise men, we will return to our own city another way." Though there is much fear in the church -- fear of failure, fear of past decisions, fear of new things -- Christ breaks through fear, he said. "We do not need to depend on our faith. . . it comes and goes," he chuckled. "But we can depend on His faith in us! Christ left it all in the hands of those few frail men and women who hadn't got hold of the right end of the stick. God's faith in us. . . overwhelming!"

As one woman participant from the upper midwest put it: "I've tended to be discouraged about the state of the church. This conference has made me feel encouraged again!"

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#### PICTURE CAPTION

# 80326      Shown in procession during an Episcopal Conference on Evangelism and Shared Ministry in St. Louis, Sept. 18-21, are, from left, Presiding Bishop John M. Allin, Bishop Michael Marshall of Woolwich, England, and Bishop Albert W. Hillestad of Springfield (Illinois). Sponsored by PEWSACTION and the Office of Evangelism and Renewal at the Episcopal Church Center in New York, the conference drew 1,200 persons from all parts of the United States and the Episcopal Church. Moderator of the conference was Harry C. Griffith, Winter Park, Fla., executive director of the Anglican Fellowship of Prayer, one of the member-groups of PEWSACTION. (Photo Credit: Nell McDonald)

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